

Saint Teresa of Avila



Saint Teresa of Avila

By

David Lewis

COVER ART: Detail from “Teresa of Ávila” by French artist, François Pascal Simon Gérard (1770–1837). The painting is housed in the Infirmerie Marie-Thérèse, in Paris, France.*



* The original of this work is in the public domain in the United States and in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.

SAINT TERESA was born in Avila, in the kingdom of Spain, on March 28, 1515. She was baptized in the Church of Saint John Baptist, on April 4, Wednesday in Holy Week. On that day, Mass was said for the first time in the Monastery of the Incarnation of the Order of Carmel, where she spent so many years of her life as one of the religious of that house.

Her old and honorable father, Don Alfonso Sanchez de Cepeda, was twice married and twice widowed. His first wife was Dona Catalina del Peso y Henao, by whom he had three children, one girl and two boys. His second wife, Dona Beatriz Davila y Ahumada, was the mother of nine children, seven boys and two girls. The elder of the two daughters, and the third child of the marriage, was Saint Teresa, known for many years of her life as Dona Teresa Sanchez Cepeda Davila y Ahumada.

Don Alfonso was a man of solid piety, most charitable to the poor and the sick, and very gentle and considerate with his servants. Dona Beatriz also took all pains to bring up her children in the fear and love of God and devout to Our Lady and the saints. Therefore, she laid the foundations for the spiritual life of her daughter, who, before she was seven years old, gave alms out of the little money she had and contrived to be alone so she might say her prayers, especially the Rosary. Saint Teresa, in playing with the other children, would delight in imitating religious, and she tells us she wished to be a nun, but not as much as she wished to be a hermit or a martyr.

She and one of her elder brothers read lives of saints together. When she read of martyrdom, it struck her that this was a very small price to pay for the vision of God, and discussed with her brother how they could obtain it. The two children agreed that they must go to Africa, where the Moors would behead them because they were Christians. They resolved to execute their purpose, meaning to beg as they went, and so they left their father's house by stealth. They got as far as the gates of the city when they were met by one of their uncles, who took them home, to the great relief of their mother, who was sending the servants into the streets of the city in search of her missing children.

Disappointed in their hopes of martyrdom, the two children resolved to leave the world and make themselves hermits in their father's garden. They collected stones to build their cells, but their inexperience defeated them. The stones fell down from the walls they raised, and they knew not how to make them firm. Saint Teresa was barely seven years of age when she did this, and she was perfectly serious in her childish way.

Her mother, always in delicate health, died towards the end of the year 1528 or in the beginning of the next, to the great sorrow of the Saint. In her trouble, Saint Teresa went to the Church of Our Lady of Charity in the hospital of the city, where strangers and pilgrims were lodged. There, before an image of Our Lady, she implored Our Lady with

tears to be to her a mother. Her prayer was heard, and she relates that in all her trials she was always succored whenever she called upon that compassionate mother.

Saint Teresa found that she had another most tender and loving mother in her eldest sister, who watched over her with a jealous eye, and in whom she could detect nothing but goodness. Early in 1531, her eldest sister married. Upon the departure of her sister for the country where her husband lived, Don Alfonso took Saint Teresa to the monastery of the Augustinian nuns, who had a school for persons of her age and condition, for she was too young to be left at home as mistress of her father's house. She, however, always accusing herself, said the reason her father sent her from home was her own giddiness and vanity. She said she had become fond of dress, took pains with her hands and her hair, made use of perfumes, and was very fastidious about her person.

Some cousins who could not be refused admittance also frequented the house, though Don Alfonso much regretted their presence. The Saint was too familiar with one of these, as she says, and too fond of listening to the cousin's stories of her follies. Saint Teresa was also fond of reading, and continued this all her life. At this time, she spent too much time reading the romances of the day—tales of chivalry. She had acquired this habit under her mother, who used to amuse herself with these books to forget, if she could, the great bodily pains to which she was subject. All this, however, was kept secret, and Don Alfonso knew nothing of it.

When taken to the monastery, Saint Teresa was very much distressed believing her removal from home was a punishment. She suffered much for about a week, however, more because of a suspicion that her vanity had been discovered than from her seclusion in the convent. She went to confession as soon as she could, and she was more content than she would have been at home. All the nuns were pleased with her, for Our Lord, she tells us, had given her the grace to please everybody. Indeed, it is known that she was a most winning and charming woman.

She was most open with her confessors. Now in the convent, having told all about herself, she was consoled by hearing that, in all those things that she called her vanities, she had not sinned. Saint Teresa became fond of and took great delight in conversation with Dona Maria Brizeno, a religious who slept in the dormitory of the seculars. Dona Maria, a person of great sanctity, whose conversation was such as became her state, made a great impression on Saint Teresa and removed from her mind in some measure the dislike she had to be a nun. "If I saw anyone weep in prayer, I envied her, for my heart was now so hard that I could not shed a tear if I read the Passion through." She said many prayers and asked the nuns to pray for her that she might learn how she was to serve God. Yet, she did wish not to be a nun and prayed that God would not call her to religion; at the same time, she was afraid of marriage. She remained in the monastery a year and a half; but, towards the end, she had a greater inclination towards the religious

life; however, not in that house. She had a friend, Dona Juana Suarez, in the monastery of the Incarnation, and that determined her to be a nun, if a nun she must be, of the Order of Carmel. These good thoughts vanished, and she says that afterwards she could not persuade herself to become a nun.

She had a serious illness and was taken home. Upon her recovery, it was settled that she should go to her married sister in the country. She stopped on the way at the house of Don Pedro, her father's brother, who detained her for some days. He was a widower and spent all his time in devotion. Finally, he gave up all his possessions and became a friar. He made the Saint read to him. Though she did not like the books, she appeared as if she did, for she would always sacrifice her own pleasure for that of others. Conversations with her uncle impressed her and she understood the truth she had heard as a child that all things are nothing and the world vanity. "I also began to be afraid," she says, "that if I were then to die I should go down to hell." She could not, however, bend her will to become a religious, though she saw it was the best and safest course. Nevertheless, by degrees she did violence to herself and determined to give herself to God.

This struggle with her lasted three months, but she did not seem to have communicated her trouble to anyone. When she thought of her own delicate nature, her poor health, the fainting spells to which she was now subject, Teresa would say to herself that she could not endure the hardships of the religious life. Then she would answer herself that the sufferings of a nun cannot be greater than the pains of purgatory, that she deserved to be in hell, and that it would not be much to spend the rest of her life in purgatory and win heaven. During the months of her inward trials, she became fond of reading good books, which helped her very much, especially the epistles of Saint Jerome.

At last, she told her father of her resolution to be a nun. Don Alfonso was a good man, but the love of his child prevailed; and she had more of his love than any of his children. He refused his consent and neither the prayers of his child nor the entreaties of others could move him. He was as resolute in refusing as she was resolute in going. All she could get from him was that she might do as she pleased after his death. The Saint saw the danger of delay, and made up her mind to execute her purpose at whatever cost.

While preparing herself to obey the call of God, Teresa persuaded one of her brothers to become a friar. The brother and sister laid their plans and early one morning secretly left their father's house—her brother for the Dominican house in Avila and Teresa for the Monastery of the Incarnation where her friend Dona Juana Suarez was a religious. "I remember perfectly well," she wrote afterwards, "and it is quite true, that the pain I felt when I left my father's house was so great that I do not believe the pain of dying will be greater. It seemed as if all the bones in my body were wrenched asunder." This was on November 2, 1533, the feast of All Souls.

She went to that Monastery because she wished to be with her friend, but would have gone to any other if she could have served God more faithfully in it, or to any convent that her father preferred. God led her by her natural affection for that nun, while she was trampling on a greater, natural affection—her love for her father. The nuns received her, but, at the same time, sent word to Don Alfonso. The father hurried to the monastery, but he returned home without his child. God changed his heart, and he made the sacrifice demanded of him.

The novitiate seems to have been a cross. “I suffered much uneasiness,” she says, “about things of no importance, was found fault with very often when I was blameless. I bore it painfully and with imperfection.”

“However, I went through it all because of the joy I had in being a nun. When they saw me seeking to be alone, and even weeping over my sins at times, they thought I was discontented, and said so.” She confesses, too, that she was vain in some things. She did not know how to use the Breviary or how to behave in choir; she knew the other novices could have taught her, but “I never asked them,” she says, “that they might not know how little I knew.” She says her singing was bad, that she made mistakes and was ashamed of doing so in the presence of the nuns. At last, she asked to be instructed in her part before she entered the choir. It was painful to her at first and then became a pleasure to do so. When she became indifferent about her good singing, she sang much better and she was never vexed at its being known in the monastery that her singing was not good.

She conquered herself in another way. She had been brought up delicately, typical for her state. Now, she made an effort to overcome her fastidiousness. A nun in the house was ill of a very loathsome disorder and the other nuns were afraid of it. Teresa, admiring the patience of the sick sister, became her nurse and prayed to have similar patience whatever illness might befall her. God heard her prayer and, in less than two years, she was stricken down and to all appearance beyond the reach of human help.

Before this came to pass, at the end of her year of novitiate she made her profession. When the time had come, she had to do violence to herself again as the tempter made another great effort to keep her in the world, as if he knew the great things she was to do. Teresa fought the battle alone, confiding her trouble to no one, and no one saw any sign of the inward tumult. She made her profession and was filled with a great joy—a joy she never lost.

Her joy now had to be tempered with bodily illness of no common kind—a disease of the heart accompanied with pains so sharp at times as to deprive her of consciousness. The physicians of Avila had no remedies for it and her father took her out of the monastery that she might be put under the care of a woman in Bezadas, who had a name for the treating of infirmities like those of the Saint. As the monastery was not enclosed, her

friend Dona Juana was allowed to accompany her. They went first to their uncle's house; then to her sister's, where she spent the winter. There, the Saint read a book called *Tercer Abecedario*, which treats of prayer, and resolved to follow the way of prayer described in it. She now had the gift of tears and found pleasure in reading, loved to be alone, and went to confession often. Yet, she had no one who would teach her how to make her prayer. Teresa made great progress notwithstanding, but she did not know it, nor did she understand her own state. "I spent," she says, "nearly nine months in the practice of solitude" and, all this while, Our Lord Himself was her teacher. "He raised me," she says, "to the prayer of quiet and, now and then, to that of union, though I understood not what either the one or the other was, nor the great esteem I ought to have had of them."

In April of 1536, she went to Bezadas, but the rough treatment made her worse and the three months of her stay there brought her almost to death's door. The pain at the heart was so sharp and unendurable that those about her feared it might end in madness. She loathed all food and could do no more than drink that which they gave her. Her bodily weakness was extreme and, with it all, she was overwhelmed in great sadness.

Still, God gave her patience and she bore all her sufferings without a murmur, remembering the history of Job and his resignation to the will of God. They brought her home to Avila in a state worse than that in which she had left. In August, when the feast of Our Lady was at hand, Teresa asked for her confessor. Her father thought that she was afraid she was going to die and would not listen, hoping thereby to quiet her. "That very night," she says, "my sickness became so sharp that I remained insensible for nearly four days." She received the last Sacraments and was expected to die every moment. Her father was inconsolable because he had kept her from confession.

They dug her grave in the monastery and the Carmelite fathers sang the Requiem for her, for all believed that she must be dead. She recovered, however, and insisted on going to confession at once. Of that confession she says that it was of all her faults, "for this grace among others did Our Lord bestow on me, that ever since my first Communion I never failed to confess everything that I thought was wrong, even if it were only a venial sin."

She was still so ill that she could not swallow even a drop of water. She was bent, as she says, "like a coil of ropes," unable to move any part of her body except one finger of her right hand. She could not bear to be touched and they had to move her in a sheet. Even in this state, Teresa would return to her monastery and she did so in a most pitiable condition, which lasted more than eight months. She was paralyzed for about three years, and praised God when she was able to crawl on hands and knees (which she regarded as nothing compared with the tortures she had undergone) and was content to remain in that state if that was the will of God.

Her longing for solitude, that she might give herself to prayer, made her wish for health. In the infirmary, solitude was impossible. Yet, she was not idle. She observed such exact measure of her words as to keep herself and those with whom she conversed from all detraction. Thus, it was understood in the monastery that when she was present, absent persons were safe. She confessed and communicated more frequently, read much, yet did not venture to pray very often, because of the bitter anguish that came upon her because she had offended God. She was also kept from prayer because she did not see much improvement in herself, though she made good resolutions. Even her tears and contrition made her angry with herself.

Teresa had a great devotion to Saint Joseph. The physicians of this world, she says, had failed her, and so she went to those of heaven. She had Masses said and prayers made for herself. Her wish for health prevailed and Saint Joseph healed her. He “my lord and father,” she writes, “delivered me and rendered me greater services than I knew how to ask for.” She tells us that, having recovered her health, she began to forget the practices of her earlier days. She was required to frequent the parlors of the monastery and in many ways had as much freedom allowed her as the older nuns. Yet, she confesses that she never abused it. She had many friends and people eagerly sought her out as she was so winning in her ways. One day while with a friend—it was at the beginning of her acquaintance with the friend—Our Lord stood before her, “stern and grave,” and made her see that her conduct displeased Him. “I saw Him,” she says, “with the eyes of the soul more distinctly than I could have seen Him with the eyes of the body.” Therefore, she resolved never to meet that person again. Satan, however, prevailed. She was made to think it was her imagination, yielded to the temptation, and returned to her new friend. She was told there was no harm in seeing the new friend and that she gained instead of losing reputation by so doing. On another occasion in the parlor with that same person, a great toad crawled towards them in their sight and in the sight of others who were there. She recognized this to be another warning, but no one told her she was in the wrong except one of the nuns, who was then old, and a relative of the Saint. Even this did not restrain her—she frequented the parlor as before.

Teresa had now given up mental prayer, though in the beginning of her illness she had helped others to pray. Among them was her own father, whom she brought to adopt the practice of mental prayer. He made great progress in it and that delighted the Saint. He came often to the monastery, for he found great comfort in speaking of the things of God. This was another torture to his daughter, who for a year and more gave up the practice, thinking it an act of great humility to abstain. She was always honest, so she told her father that she did not pray. She alleged her health as her excuse, and that she could do no more than pray for the community. He believed her, but was sorry for her, for he had found the treasure of prayer himself. He came to the monastery as usual, and after seeing his daughter, would quickly go away, saying that he was wasting his time.

Though Teresa gave up her practice of mental prayer, she intended to resume it. She “was waiting to be very free from sin first.” Still, she was unable to mention a single mortal sin and, during the whole of this time, her confessors found no fault with her. This false humility was about to be corrected, for her father fell ill, and she, not being bound to enclosure, had leave to nurse him in his sickness, which was his last. He died as he had lived, to the great joy of the Saint, who nevertheless felt acutely her loss, for he was to her all the comfort and good of her life, and she his most cherished child. Her father’s confessor was the Dominican friar, Father Vicente Baron, and she made her confession to him, giving him at the same time an account of her whole life including her mental prayer, which she had abandoned. The father charged her to resume her prayer, never to omit it, and to go to Communion once a fortnight. Obedient to his directions, her life became a burden because she learnt in prayer more and more her faults. She took delight in the things of God, but she frequented the parlor, and tried to reconcile the life of the spirit with that of sense.

She persevered in prayer and God rewarded her so abundantly that she, looking upon herself as a great sinner, felt these graces of God as “a fearful kind of torment.” She dreaded the time for prayer, for she knew no penance she would not have more willingly endured than going to her oratory to pray.

God visited Teresa in visions and revelations and she, still thinking herself to be a most miserable sinner, began to be afraid of delusions. She saw that these visitations of God were inconsistent with her way of life, though she was laboring to mend it. She was raised to “the prayer of quiet and very often to that of union, which lasted some time,” but her fears grew. She had no one to help her and yet God Himself was directing her the whole time. She heard of some priests who would help her—the Fathers of the Society had come to Avila—but she “did not think herself fit to speak to them.”

Teresa had heard of a learned priest in the city, who was greatly respected for his saintly life. She resolved to consult him, and contrived to do so with the help of Don Francis de Salcedo, his friend, and a friend of her and her family. Don Francis, like his wife, was a man of prayer. After his wife’s death, he became a priest, and was chaplain and confessor of the Carmelites of Saint Joseph’s, which the Saint had founded. Over twenty years of his married life, he attended the theological lectures of the Dominicans in Avila. He brought that priest, Gaspar Daza, to the Monastery of the Incarnation, and the Saint made known to him the state of her soul and her way of prayer, but he would not hear her confession. He did, however, give her strong counsel. Yet the Saint confessed that she could not have made any progress under his direction, although he had a special grace and gift for the conduct of beginners.

She was disappointed in this, but afterwards saw in the failure of Gaspar Daza that it was a grace of God “that I might know,” she says, “and converse with persons as holy as the

members of the Society of Jesus.” She was still afraid of them, and made Don Francis, the layman, her director. He helped her to overcome her imperfections by sound counsel and by the story of his own difficulties and weaknesses. She improved under his direction, but Don Francis became afraid when she told him of the great graces she received in prayer. He, being led by a different road, could not understand it, and told her he was afraid she was under delusions. He asked her to explain to him the way of prayer. She replied that she could not, because she did not understand it herself. She was now greatly distressed and wept over her misery.

Teresa looked into the treating of prayer in certain books. She found in one of them a description of her way of prayer, and showed it to Don Francis, who took the book to Gaspar Daza that they might consider it together. They considered the matter, and came to the conclusion that the Saint was deceived by Satan. Don Francis went to her in great distress with the information, which she received with great fear and dread. While they were considering this matter, she had prayed earnestly and had asked others to pray, that she might be delivered from her anxiety. This resulted in her being told she was deluded, she had better make a general confession to Father Juan de Padranos of the Society of Jesus, and she must observe with the utmost faithfulness the counsel he would give her.

She wept, but obeyed at once, and began to prepare for her general confession. The Father came and understood her state. He said it was the work of the Holy Ghost but she must make her prayer more systematically because the foundation of it had not been properly laid. She was to force herself to make her prayer and mortify herself, because the graces that God had given her were so singular. It might be the will of God to do great things by her. She was to meditate daily on the Passion and resist the extraordinary effects of her prayer until he gave her leave to yield to them.

Teresa was now in great peace, obedient to the new direction, resolved to advance by self-denial and careful observance of all her duties, and to practice greater poverty by cutting off all superfluities. She disciplined herself even unto blood, praying earnestly that Our Lord would keep her from falling again into her former ways.

At this time, the Duke of Gandia, then Father Francis Borgia, of the Society, came to Avila. Her confessor and Don Francis de Salcedo brought him to the Monastery of the Incarnation, that he might examine the spirit of the Saint. He heard her, and said that her state was the work of the Holy Ghost. Further, he said she was not to resist the sweetness and joy of her prayer as she had done for two months. This was a relief to her, and Don Francis himself was convinced that the Saint was not deluded.

Father Juan de Padranos was removed from Avila and the Saint was in trouble again in not knowing how to find a confessor. One of her relatives obtained leave for Saint Teresa to come to her house, where Teresa made the acquaintance of a lady given to

prayer, Dona Guiomar de Ulloa. Dona Guiomar de Ulloa took Teresa to Father Baltasar Alvarez. "He began," says Teresa, "by putting me in the way of perfection." He insisted on her giving up certain friendships that were harmless, though she admits there was too much natural affection in them. She resisted at first and asked him if she must be ungrateful. He replied that she was to lay the matter before God, and recite the *Veni Creator*. Then she, having prayed for some time, began the hymn and, while saying it, fell into an ecstasy. This was her first and in it she heard the words, "I will have thee converse not with men, but with angels." She was afraid at first, but was comforted at the same time. From that day forth, she says, "I have never been able to form friendship with, nor have any comfort in, nor any particular affection for, any person whatever except those who, as I believe, love God and strive to serve Him." She gave up her friendships without pain either to herself or to her friends, who were even edified.

Now Our Lord gave her one of the heaviest of crosses—the opposition of good people. The great work of Our Lord in the soul of the Saint could not be hidden. Not everyone she had consulted kept her secret. It became known that she had visions and revelations and that she was unlike other devout persons in Avila. At this time, her heart was pierced by the lance of the angel; and she made the vow of the highest perfection in all her actions. She had the consolation of learning from Saint Peter of Alcantara that he approved of it and of all her ways.

Father Alvarez was now absent from Avila, and her confessor convinced himself, or seemed to do so, that her visions were illusions of Satan. He ordered Teresa to make the Sign of the Cross when she had a vision, to point her finger at it in scorn, and to be firmly persuaded of its diabolic nature. This was very hard, for the Saint had no doubt about the visions—they were her treasure. She had defended herself as well as she could against the objections of those who knew of them, and had allowed them to say all they pleased without contradicting them. Yet, they charged her with want of humility. This last counsel of the confessor distressed her beyond measure but she obeyed, though it was most painful to her to make the Sign of the Cross whenever she saw Our Lord. "If they had cut me in pieces," she says, "I could not believe it was Satan." She held a crucifix constantly in her hand that she might not be continually making the Sign of the Cross. As for making signs of contempt, she could not do so. It reminded her of the insults of the Jews.

At last, Our Lord consoled her, saying that she had done well to obey and that He would make them understand the truth of the matter. Even her confessors proved a source of trouble to her, though Father Alvarez always consoled her even when he was compelled to be hard with her. By her own account, God had raised her to a high degree of prayer but had not given her the knowledge of it and had not given her the ability to describe it. Then, when she was called upon by those who examined her spirit to explain herself, she

could do nothing but repeat over and over again the same thing. Later, God enabled her to speak, and she spoke as no one had spoken before—so fully and so clearly.

Of herself, thus writes Teresa when she had been forty years in religion. She “occasionally heard interior locutions and had visions and revelations interiorly.” She “saw with the eyes of the soul, for she never saw anything with her bodily eyes, nor heard anything with her bodily ears.” Twice, she thinks, she heard a voice, but she “understood not that which was spoken.” It was a sort of making things present when she saw these things interiorly. They passed away like a meteor most frequently. The vision, however, remained so impressed on her mind, and produced such effects, that it was as if she saw those things with her bodily eyes and more.

When told that her visions were the work of an evil spirit, Teresa replied that it could not be, for Satan would not do anything to help her to correct her faults. Father Alvarez always defended her, but he was often overruled by those whom the Saint had been made to consult. Being very humble, he distrusted himself, and that occasioned trouble, for the others were very confident and remonstrated with him. When they were agreed that the visions of the Saint were the work of Satan, he told her to keep nothing hidden from him, and then if all her visions were the work of the devil she would come to no harm, for God would bring good out of evil. She obeyed him in everything and, for three years, he had as much to suffer as she. At last, God made known to him the truth, and “I believe,” says the Saint, “that he received this light from the Blessed Sacrament.”

From first to last, these trials of her spirit lasted six years. The more they tried her, the more she fell into a trance. Many prayers were made and many Masses were said that Our Lord would “lead her by another way.” However, it was not the will of God. He had a great work for her to do and He prepared her and directed her Himself through the furnace of that which was in reality the persecution or contradiction of good men, which is one of the greatest trials of saints.

There were nearly two hundred nuns in the Monastery of the Incarnation, and the Saint longed for a solitary life. She was subject to visits within the Monastery, and her friends obtained leave for her to visit them at their houses. She was weary of this. One day in her cell with others like-minded, her niece, Maria de Ocampo, brought up under her care, said, in the midst of a conversation about a more retired life, that she would give a thousand ducats to build them a house, if they wished to be like the barefooted Orders. Maria was young, not at all given to austerities, but very fond of dress. No sooner had she thus spoken than she had a vision of Our Lord. Her offer was accepted, and she herself afterwards was among the early novices of the new Carmel, and later on Prioress of Valladolid.

The Saint communicated her desires and the offer of her niece to Dona Guiomar, who began at once to consider how to find revenue for the new house. The Saint however, was not over eager now, as she had become fond of her monastery and her cell, and could not leave them.

One day after Communion, Our Lord bade her found the house, and made her great promises. His promises included these: He would delight in it; it should be called the house of Saint Joseph; though the Religious Orders were then relaxed, she was not to think that He was scantily served in them—for what would become of the world if there were no religious in it? She was to tell her confessor all this and He also asked him not to thwart her in the matter.

Teresa gave an account in writing of this to her confessor, who could not order her to abandon her purpose, though he saw no means of accomplishing it. He bade her tell her superior, the Provincial of the Order, and act according to his direction. She never spoke of her visions to the Provincial, who was told of the plan by Dona Guiomar. He was pleased, gave Dona Guiomar all the help he could, promising to accept the new covenant. She wrote also to Saint Peter of Alcantara, who approved of the whole proceeding.

Instantly, a violent persecution befell the Saint. “Sharp sayings and keen jests.” People said it was folly and everybody was against her. Dona Guiomar was even refused absolution because she would not abandon the Saint, and was told she was bound to remove the scandal she had given.

Dona Guiomar laid the matter before Father Pedro Ibañez, a holy Dominican. The Saint also went to him, but never said a word about any revelation, confining herself wholly to ordinary reasons, for she would have his opinion without respect to visions and revelations. “He asked us to give him eight days before he answered, and also if we had made up our minds to abide by what he might say.” “I said we had,” was the answer of the Saint, “but though I said so, and though I thought so, I never lost a certain confidence that the monastery would be founded. My friend had more faith than I. Nothing they could say would make her give it up.”

Father Pedro told them afterwards that, at first, he had made up his mind against the foundation. He had heard the cry against the Saint and had been warned to be cautious. Yet, he was changed when he began to consider his decision. He recognized the hand of God, and not only bade the Saint go on, but also told her further how she was to accomplish her end. He also advised her to send to him anyone who objected, and he would answer him. The Saint being now reassured and her friend consoled, a house was bought, and the deeds of purchase were prepared. The day before the papers were to be signed, the Provincial declined to acknowledge the house, moved thereunto by the opposition of the nuns in the Monastery of the Incarnation.

People were now more certain than before that the Saint was doing a foolish thing, and hard words became more common. "I was now very much disliked throughout the whole monastery, because I wished to found another of stricter observance. It was said that I insulted my sisters; that I could serve God among them as well as elsewhere, for there were many among them much better than I; that I did not love the house; and that it would have been better if I had procured greater resources for it instead of founding another. Some said I ought to be put in prison; others, but they were not many, defended me in some degree."

Notwithstanding all this, she was very happy. She submitted joyfully to the will of God, for she had done all she could to fulfill His command. Yet, she was unable to give up her conviction that the work would be done. Another trouble now befell her from an unexpected source. From her confessor, she received a letter that seemed to charge her with disobedience. She was bid to acknowledge that all she had been doing was folly, and to abstain from her purpose because of the scandal she had caused. She humbled herself and set about examining her conscience, thinking perhaps her visions were illusions and that she had been deceived. Her affliction was very great, but Our Lord came to her aid. He bade her not to distress herself, that she had pleased Him greatly, and had not sinned in the whole affair. This so consoled her that she regarded the persecution she had suffered as nothing.

At this time, God visited her in prayer in a more wonderful way—in violent impetuosities of divine love and added marvelous trances. She never spoke of the work herself because of the commandment of her confessor, but the Dominican father was not bound to silence. He, convinced that the new monastery was for the glory of God, communicated with Dona Guiomar. Both of them wrote to Rome and made what preparations they could for the foundation.

It was now spread abroad that the Saint had had a revelation, so her friends came to her in great fear, saying that the times were dangerous and that she might be taken before the Inquisitors. She laughed, for she was never afraid of them, and offered to go herself before the judges, being conscious that she would not break even the least ceremony of the Church. She gave an account of all her visions and revelations to the Dominican. He told her to be afraid of nothing.

Teresa remained quiet for five or six months "neither thinking nor speaking of the matter," but not free from trouble, thinking her confessor, Father Alvarez, did not trust her. Then one day, Our Lord said to her, "Be not troubled, this suffering will soon be over." She was gladdened by the words because she thought that her death was nigh. She was very happy whenever those words came to her remembrance. That, however, was not the relief promised by Our Lord: this was the arrival in Avila of the new rector of the Society, Father Gaspar de Salazar, to whom, at the request of Father Alvarez, she

made known her state. She used to feel the greatest repugnance to speak of the graces of God bestowed upon her but now “when I went to the confessional,” she tells us, “I felt in my soul something, I know not what, I do not remember to have felt so either before or after towards anyone. I cannot tell what it was, nor do I know of anything with which I could compare it. It was a spiritual joy and a conviction in my soul that his soul must understand mine, that it was in unison with it, and, yet, as I have said, I knew not how.” She knew nothing of the rector, had never spoken to him before, and now found in him the guide she needed and the direction fitted for her state. Father de Salazar spoke to Father Alvarez and told him to console the Saint and not to direct her along a road so narrow but to leave the operations of the Spirit alone.

Shortly after this, Our Lord began to urge the foundation of the new monastery and bade the Saint lay the matter before the rector and her confessor. She was further required to tell Father Alvarez to make a meditation on Ps. xci—*Quam magnificata sunt opera Tua*. Father Alvarez did so and, from that day forth, he never opposed the Saint’s work.

The foundation of the monastery was now resumed in secret. The Saint, however, would do nothing against obedience, still knowing that if she spoke to her superiors in the Order, all would be lost again as it was before. She asked her brother-in-law, Juan de Ovalle, to take a house in Avila. He consented. The house was bought for the Saint, with money furnished by two women who intended to become nuns and with money sent to her from India by her brother, Lorenzo. The Saint never expected it, and her brother knew nothing of her activities. When her brother and sister had come to Avila, she had leave to visit them. Thus, she was enabled to, without exciting suspicion, direct the workers who were to make the house a monastery. Somehow, however, suspicion was aroused. One day when the Saint and her sister went to hear the sermon in the Dominican church, the preacher broke out in violent reproaches against those who had visions and revelations. It was impossible to mistake his meaning, which could hardly have been better expressed if he had uttered the name of Saint Teresa. The Saint heard it without being in the least disturbed, but her sister was less patient and took her out of the church and back to the Monastery of the Incarnation.

She was arranging the house in her poverty, for she had no money. Dona Guiomar was in the same straits. Once, having no money to pay the workers, Saint Joseph appeared and bade her employ them. She did so, and the money came. She was told by Our Lord that it was not expedient then to place the new monastery under the jurisdiction of the Order. He told her that she “must send to Rome” in a certain way, which He also explained. “He said He would take care that I found help there; and so I did,” she says. “I sent to Rome as Our Lord directed me, for we should never have succeeded otherwise, and most favorable was the result.”

She returned to her brother-in-law, for her presence was necessary. One day, while her nephew, her sister's son, was amusing himself among the materials amassed for the building, a piece of the wall that had been poorly built fell on and killed him. Nobody was near, and the child lay dead for some hours. His father had been absent and, upon his return, found his child lifeless among the ruins. He lifted up the body and carried it straight to the Saint's room, laid it down before her, and went out without saying a word.

Meanwhile the mother, observing the gloom that had overspread the house, and the silence of the servants, suspected some great calamity, and, with loud cries and tears, rushed into her sister's room. The Saint made her a sign to be silent. She then took the child into her arms and covered him with her veil. No one heard her utter a word, but very soon, the child began to caress his aunt, who at once gave him to his mother and bade her kiss him. The child was not only alive, but without a sign of having been hurt.

He was very fond of his aunt, and used to say to her that she was bound to see after his salvation, for he had been so near to the vision of God, but she had called him back. He survived her three years.

Don Juan de Ovalle had been in Avila since August 10, 1561. Towards the end of the year, the difficulty of keeping the secret was becoming greater and greater for him. On the night of Christmas Day, the Saint received an order from the Provincial to go with one of the sisters to Toledo, to console Dona Luisa de la Cerda, who was in great distress on account of her husband's death. Dona Luisa had heard much of the Saint and of her great gifts, and, being a friend of the Provincial, obtained the order without difficulty. The Saint was troubled, "because," as she says, "they thought there was some good in me, I knowing myself to be so wicked could not bear it." Thus, it always was with her; she never saw herself as others saw her.

She set out immediately for Toledo with one of the nuns, and her presence was of the greatest service to Dona Luisa, who conceived a great affection for her, which she returned. She had been required by Father Pedro Ibanez to write for him an account of her whole life, and now in the house of Dona Luisa she finished that which she had begun in the Monastery of the Incarnation.

In Toledo, she was visited by Maria of Jesus, who had been a novice in the Carmelite Monastery of Granada, and, during her novitiate, had revelations about a reform of the Order. "Our Lord had moved her," says the Saint, "in the same year that He had moved me, to found another monastery of the Order. As He had given her this desire, she sold all she possessed and went to Rome to obtain the necessary faculties. She went on foot and barefooted, "with two others of the Order of Saint Francis." Pius IV heard her petition, and then looking at her bleeding feet said, "Woman of strong courage, let it be as thou desires." She returned to Granada, but the Carmelites and the town council

would not allow her to found a house in the city. Some even threatened to have her publicly whipped. It was from Maria of Jesus that the Saint learnt that the old Carmelite rule enjoined absolute poverty. Not knowing this, she was about to found her house with revenues, that the religious might be free from all anxiety about their temporal affairs. "Not thinking," she says, "of the many anxieties the possession of property brings in its train."

The Saint saw that poverty was the safe course, but feared that she could not obtain the assent of others to the adoption of so severe a way of life, that they would charge her with folly, and that they would tell her she must not be the cause of suffering to others. She had now for some time wished, if it were possible in her state, to go about a beggar for the love of God, to have no house of her own, nor anything else.

She consulted the spiritual men of her acquaintance, as she did in everything, but hardly anyone approved. They had such good reasons for their opinion that Teresa was willing to give up her own and admit they were in the right. When "I returned to my prayer," she writes, "and saw Our Lord on the Cross, so poor and destitute, I could not bear to be rich, and I implored Him with tears so to order matters that I might be poor as He was."

She wrote to her Dominican friend, Father Pedro Ibanez, who "sent back two sheets by way of reply," she says, "full of objections and theology against my plan, telling me that he had thought much on the subject. I answered that in order to escape from my vocation, the vow of poverty I had made, and the perfect observance of the counsels of Christ, I did not want any theology to help me, and in this case I should not thank him for his learning."

At her request, Saint Peter of Alcantara came to the house of Dona Luisa. He knew the worth of poverty and charged the Saint on no account to give way. Then, Our Lord Himself told her that the monastery must be founded in poverty; that it was His will and the will of His Father; and that no one who served Him would ever be in want of the necessities of life. Father Ibanez came round to her views at last. "Now," says the Saint, "I was in the greatest joy at hearing this and having these opinions in my favor it seemed to me nothing less than the possession of all the wealth of the world when I had resolved to live in poverty for the love of God."

When she had been about six months in Toledo, the Provincial sent word that she might return to her monastery, but if she wished to remain she might stay. This was the time of the elections and she was told that many of the nuns meant to elect her prioress. "Though willing to suffer any kind of martyrdom for God, I could not persuade myself at all to accept this, and so I gave thanks to God I was not then in the convent, wrote to my friends, and begged them not to vote for me."

Glad to be free, she would remain, but Our Lord told her she must return to Avila, and that, as she longed for a cross, there was a cross prepared for her, and a heavy one. She began to cry, thinking that the office of prioress was her cross and went to her confessor, who bade her go, for that was the more perfect course. Dona Luisa was very sorry, but acquiesced on being told that the parting was for the service of God. The Saint was distressed and, at the same time, in great peace and joy because she was going to suffer. "Our Lord had told me," are her words, "that I was going to carry a heavy cross—though I never thought it would be so heavy as I afterwards found it to be—and yet I went forth rejoicing." Her absence from Avila was of service to her work and her return at this time was necessary, for on the night of her arrival the brief sought for in Rome was delivered to Dona Guiomar. Saint Peter of Alcantara had also come and was staying in the house of Don Francis de Salcedo, but only for about eight days. He helped the Saint in all her labors, and now went with Don Francis to the Bishop to do her another and greater service. He and Don Francis persuaded the Bishop to accept the monastery, though founded in poverty and a poor house, for it was very small. "Truly this is the house of Saint Joseph," said Saint Peter of Alcantara, when he saw it, "for it is the little hospital of Bethlehem."

"Everything was done in the utmost secrecy," says the Saint. "If it had not been so, I do not see how anything could have been done at all, as it appeared afterwards the people of the city were against us. Our Lord ordained that one of my brothers-in-law should be ill and his wife away, and himself in such straits that my superiors gave me leave to remain with him." This illness of Don Juan de Ovalle enabled her to make all the arrangements necessary without exciting suspicion. "It was very wonderful, for his illness lasted no longer than was necessary for our activities. Our Lord restored him when it was necessary that he should recover his health, that I might be disengaged, and that he might leave the house empty. He was astonished at it himself, for when he saw everything ready for the coming in of the religious and his illness gone, he said to the Saint, "It is not necessary I should be ill any longer." He knew then why he had been ill.

On the feast of Saint Bartholomew, August 24, 1562, the Saint, now forty-seven years of age and in the twenty-ninth year of her religious life, accompanied by two nuns of the Incarnation who also were outside their monastery at the time but with the leave of the Provincial, took possession of the house of Saint Joseph, the building that had cost her so much labor and reproach, and founded the Carmel of the Barefooted.

She gave the habit, assisted by the two nuns, to four religious. Those were Antonia de Henao, a penitent of Saint Peter of Alcantara, whom he had prepared and reserved for the new foundation. She was henceforth known as Antonia of the Holy Ghost. The second was Maria de la Paz, whom Dona Guiomar de Ulloa had brought up and kept for the house. The third was Ursola de los Santos. She retained her name, as Ursola of the

Saints. She had been prepared for this by Gaspar Daza, the priest whom Saint Teresa had consulted in the beginning of her troubles. The fourth was Maria de Avila, sister of Julian, the priest of that name, who remained faithful to the Saint in all her trials. She was called Mary of Saint Joseph.

These were all received without a dowry—four poor orphans, as the Saint called them. Yet they were very rich in grace, four corner stones of the new Order of Carmel. They, as Barefooted Carmelites, were older than the Saint herself, the foundress, for she was even now a nun of the Incarnation living under the Mitigated Rule, under the Provincial, and could not remain in the house of Saint Joseph, any more than the two nuns who were with her—her cousins, Dona Inez and Dona Ana de Tapia. Gaspar Daza said Mass, at which were present Don Gonzalo de Aranda, Don Francis de Salcedo, Julian de Avila, Don Juan de Ovalle (her brother-in-law), and his wife, Dona Juan de Ahumada (her sister). The bell of the chapel weighed less than three pounds, and remained there for a hundred years. It was then transferred by order of the General to the monastery of Pastrana. There, the members of the general chapter assembled at the sound of the bell that was rung for the first Mass of the barefooted nuns of Carmel.

Saint Teresa was in the house lawfully, with the leave of her superiors, and “I did nothing,” she says, “without the advice of learned men, so I might not break in a single point my vow of obedience. If they had told me there was the slightest imperfection in that matter, I would have given up the founding of a thousand monasteries; how much more than this one?”

“I felt,” says the Saint, “as if I was in bliss.” She had obeyed her confessors in all things, had done that which Our Lord enjoined her; and for three or four hours was in great peace and joy. Then Satan began to torment her with scruples about obedience, with doubts about the perseverance of the religious in so austere a life, and even with her own ability to live with them. Her distress became so great that she could think of nothing else and her soul was plunged into darkness. “When I found myself in this state,” she says, “I went and placed myself before the most Holy Sacrament, though I could not pray to Him; so great was my anguish that I was like one in the agony of death. I could not make the matter known to anyone, because no confessor had as yet been appointed.”

In this distress she promised Our Lord to do all in her power to enter Saint Joseph’s and, if it could be done with a good conscience, to make a vow of enclosure. “When I had done this,” she writes, “the devil fled in a moment and left me calm and peaceful; and I have continued so ever since. The enclosure, penance, and other rules of this house are to me, in their observance, so singularly sweet and light. The joy I have is so exceedingly great, that I am now and then thinking what on earth I could have chosen which should be more delightful.”

This fight with Satan fatigued her greatly, and she wished to rest a little after dinner, but there was no rest for her today. The nuns of the Incarnation had heard of her doings, and the Prioress sent for her. She went, leaving the four religious in great distress. She felt that there was more trouble for her, being persuaded that she would be put in prison. The thought of that, however, consoled her, because she longed to be alone and, in the prison of the monastery, she would have solitude enough.

Teresa told everything to the Prioress, who was softened a little, but the Provincial must be told also. When he arrived at the monastery the Saint appeared before him to answer for her deeds. "I confessed my fault," she says, "as if I had been very much to blame; and so I seemed to everyone who did not know all the reasons. After the Provincial had rebuked me sharply, though not with the severity my fault deserved nor according to the representations made to him, I would not defend myself, for I was determined to bear it all. On the contrary, I prayed him to forgive and punish, and to be no longer angry with me."

The Provincial ordered her to explain her conduct before the community and she obeyed. She spoke so well that neither the Provincial nor the nuns condemned her. Later on she spoke to the Provincial alone, who was so satisfied that he promised to let her go back to Saint Joseph's as soon as the city was calm again.

The town council and even the Canons of the Cathedral were disturbed. They held a solemn meeting to which the heads of the religious were invited and resolved that the new monastery must be broken up. Father Banes, the Dominican, alone defended it, though even he objected to the vow of poverty as understood by the Saint, whom at that time he did not know, having never seen her. He told them that the matter did not concern them and that it belonged to the Bishop. The town council was obstinate and would have no monastery founded in poverty within its territory. Therefore, the mayor went to Saint Joseph's the next day to expel the four nuns. Refused admittance, he threatened to have the door broken. The nuns replied that they were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop and not under his. He now came to his senses and retired, but was none the less bent on the destruction of the monastery. The town council then brought an action against the nuns. Saint Teresa, having no money, had to defend them. Her friends stood forth in her defense, but no lawyers in Avila would undertake their cause. Therefore, they had to defend her as well as they could themselves. The priest, Julian of Avila, served the writs in person. Don Gonzalo de Aranda went to Madrid to plead, but, before the trial began, the zeal of the town council cooled and the lawsuit was abandoned. Then in Mid-Lent, 1563, the Saint was allowed to return to her children among whom she meant to live as a nun under obedience. The community had appealed

to the Bishop and the Provincial and obtained from them the appointment of Saint Teresa as prioress. She now changed her name, and Dona Teresa Sanchez Cepeda Davila y Ahumada was henceforth Teresa of Jesus, mother of the reform of Carmel.

The Saint had now a rest of five years. These years, she says, were the most tranquil years of her life. The vow she had made in 1560, “always to do that which is the more perfect” was commuted. Her confessor judged it to be the occasion of scruples both to herself and to those who had the direction of her life. The Provincial authorized Fra Garcia of Toledo to release her from that vow and to free her to renew it in another form with certain conditions essential to its validity, by the observance of which there could be no room for scruples. This was done. She was also free from all trouble of a secular kind for, though she possessed nothing, she and her religious were rarely in want. Whenever that happened to them, they rejoiced in it.

The Saint, however, was not without her cross. She was always doubtful about the state of her soul and very much afraid of delusions. She consulted the ablest and most spiritual priests she could find. On one occasion, she made known her state to an inquisitor, and all assured her there was nothing to be afraid of. It then came into her head that spiritual men might be deceived as well as herself. So, for her own greater security, she told her confessor to consult “certain learned men, though they were not much given up to prayer.” Her desire was to be in the right way and safe on the doctrine of the Church.

Early in 1567, the General of the Order came to Avila, and visited the Saint. She told him everything, giving him also a full account of her whole life. Her story distressed the General, for he had lost her through the weakness of the Provincial, she being no longer subject to him in the Order, but to the Bishop of Avila. The General asked for the briefs by which the Saint was allowed to build her monastery and to become subject to the Bishop. They revealed that the proceedings had been irregular. When told that she was no longer under the jurisdiction of the General, the Saint was distressed. The General, with Saint Teresa’s wish and consent, readmitted her. Moreover, the General gave her leave to found other monasteries, all of which, however, were to be subject not to the Bishops, but to the Order. He also allowed her to remain in the new monastery, and forbade any of her superiors to send her back to the monastery she had left.

When the Saint began to found another monastery, she recognized the need for friars who would help the sisters and there were no friars of her reform. The Bishop of Avila also saw the same need, and asked the General to establish houses of men wherein the primitive rule should be observed. Others also made the same request and the General himself wished it could be done, but the friars opposed him. Therefore, for the sake of peace and the quiet of the Order, he declined, at least for a time, to sanction the observance of the primitive rule.

Saint Teresa wrote earnestly to the General and obtained leave to found two monasteries of men in which the primitive rule in all its strictness should be kept, as in the new house of Saint Joseph. She was glad to get the permission, but her troubles were only begun. She did not know one friar in the whole province who would accept the rule and she did not know any secular person who would enter the Order under those conditions. Nevertheless, she had no doubt that Our Lord would find the friars, so she went to Medina del Campo, where, on the feast of the Assumption, she founded her second monastery of nuns, that of Saint Joseph being the first.

She laid the foundation of that house in greater poverty than the poverty of Saint Joseph's in Avila. The house hired for her was in so ruinous a state that a few days after taking possession she was forced to remove with her sisters to another, which was lent her until her own house could be made habitable. In all troubles she was calm and joyous, rejoicing that she had to suffer. At the same time, she effectually hid from the other nuns all her own distress that they might be discouraged and faint. She had gone to Medina del Campo without the approbation of her prudent friends. Some said she was mad. Even the Bishop, who thought so highly of her, regarded the affair as folly, though he was too generous to say so to her. She had, however, the help and encouragement of her confessors—Father Baltasar Alvarez, who was at that time rector of the house of the Society in Medina, and Father Banes, her constant friend.

In Medina del Campo, she began to search for those who would begin the reform of Carmel, for she longed exceedingly to have friars under the primitive rule. She discussed the matter, but very secretly, with Fra Antonio de Heredia, the Prior of the Carmelites there. The Prior heard her with joy and promised to be himself the first friar of the reform. She thought he was jesting, for he was nearly sixty years old, unused to austerities, and of a delicate constitution. He was a very good religious—recollected, fond of his cell, and learned; but the Saint did not think he could live as a Carmelite under the primitive rule.

Fra Antonio, however, insisted on it, and assured her that he had a vocation. She accepted him on the condition that he would begin at once to order his life—he being Prior of Medina—according to the primitive rule. He submitted and suffered greatly at the hands of his brethren, who regarded his conduct as akin to folly.

However, she made a greater gain than this of Fra Antonio. She persuaded Saint John of the Cross to abandon his intent to leave the Order of Carmel for the Carthusians. About a year later, Saint Teresa saw the beginning of the reform of the friars in a most poor house, which she obtained for them in Duruelo.

The story of the friars' reform thus begun belongs rather to the life of Saint John though none will deny the guidance and inspiration of the holy Mother in this great work.

What space then remains to us we shall devote to the foundations of nuns wrought by her in the last fourteen years of her life (1568-1582). We have already described at some length the beginnings of her first two houses, at Avila and Medina del Campo. We can do no more than outline in general fashion the story of her other foundations.

These great cities and towns of Spain were the scenes of her labors of hers—Malagon, Valladolid, Toledo, Salamanca, Alba de Tormes (where she was to die), Segovia, Burgos—to mention but the chief of them. The year 1568 saw her third foundation in Malagon. Between that year and 1571, five more were made. Then, there was a pause of three years when her superiors sent her back as Prioress to the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila to revive a somewhat flagging religious spirit.

Her period of office finished, she was once more on the road. Four more foundations were completed when, for a second interval (this time of four years from 1576 to 1580), her work as foundress was laid aside. A great wave of persecution was sweeping over the reform. A new Nuncio gave heed to the reports of enemies and ordered the Saint to select one of her monasteries and remain there. Truth in time prevailed and, the storm over, Teresa, for the last time, set out on her weary journeys. Only two years of life now remained to this aged and ailing woman but this did not prevent her from in person completing four more foundations and directing a fifth, that of Granada.

Such is the list of Saint Teresa's labors in the closing decade and half of her life. Behind this dry catalogue of facts and figures and names and dates lies a story of ceaseless toil and travel. Very simply, as is her wont, she herself, in the Book of her Foundations, gives the sequence of these events. It is an illuminating document and shows Teresa in an entirely different light from that in which she appears in her other writings. In her Life, her Way of Perfection, her Interior Castle, as in her lesser works and poems, we see Teresa the mystic, the mistress of prayer and of spiritual things—*Mater Spiritualium*. In the Foundations, we glimpse another Teresa, the woman of affairs, the tireless traveler, and the foundress. To see both facets is necessary for the understanding of this wonderful life, this harmonious blending of action and contemplation.

“There was I, a poor barefooted nun, without help whatever except in Our Lord, having nothing but the leave of the General and my good desires, and with no means whatever of carrying them into effect. Neither courage nor hope failed me for, as Our Lord had given one thing (her good desires), He would also send the other (their fulfillment).” (Found., II, 6.) And again, “It was Our Lord's good pleasure that no foundation should be made without great suffering for me.” (Found., XXIV, 10.) And finally, “Remember (this to her nuns) what you possess in peace has been wrought in poverty and toil and, if you look deeply into it, you will see that most of these houses were generally founded not by man, but by the mighty hand of God.” (Found., XXVII, 9.)

These simple words of the Saint herself are summed up in the story of her foundations; made in poverty, in suffering, and in the face of endless difficulties and contradictions, but supported always “by the mighty hand of God.”

Seldom, if ever, did Teresa take the initiative in this work. As she went along, appeals came to her, now from this town, now from that, for a colony of her nuns. Sometimes, it came from the bishop. At other times, it came from rich, devout lay-people anxious to give their wealth and, at times, even themselves to God’s service. On occasion, it came from the town authorities or a municipality. Teresa turned away from none wherever she saw the least prospect of success, and there were times when she even went against all dictates of human prudence in obedience to the voice of God or of superiors. Once she had decided on a foundation, she lost no time in getting the work under way.

“We traveled in carriages well covered, for that is ever our way of traveling,” she writes in describing the foundation of Seville. But these “carriages” were little better than covered wagons—unsprung and jolting things, made infinitely more painful by the rough and stony roads of those days, which were also at times steep and precipitous. At times, in summer’s scorching heat as in winter’s chilling cold, these journeys were made for days on end and the only rest was a short stop by the wayside, a night spent in a poor inn, or even sitting on the benches of some village church. When Saint Teresa once compared life to a night spent in a bad inn, no doubt, she had in mind these poor shelters of sixteenth century Spain.

There were dangers as well as discomforts on these treks. Thus, on her way to Seville for the foundation there, in 1575 they were nearly drowned crossing the Guadalquivir in a boat. When the nuns were being ferried over in their “carriages,” the boat broke loose the boat stuck and some timely help from the shore saved them from disaster. “We began to pray and the boatmen to shout,” writes Teresa of this incident. We have no doubt which proved the more effective.

Yet again, on the way to Soria in 1581, the guide lost his way and frequently led them into places where they were required to dismount to allow the “carriage” to be taken over deep precipices where it almost swung in the air. “I give Our Lord thanks because He was pleased to save us from the dangers of this road.” (Found., XXXI, 13.) Echoes surely of Saint Paul: “in journeyings often, in perils of waters . . . in perils in the wilderness . . . in labor and painfulness . . . in hunger and thirst . . . in cold.” (2. Cor. ii, 26.)

After long and painful journeys, usually there followed equally long and painful negotiations for the purchase or renting of a house, for the soothing of interests that thought themselves threatened, or for the license of the Bishop without which no foundation could or would be made. Though Teresa had good friends and was not one to

be haphazard in her ways, circumstances and the wishes of superiors often led her to foundations for which little or no preparation had been made. Every one of them had birth-pangs and trials at commencement.

There was the Archbishop of Burgos who gave “with pleasure” permission to found in his city. Yet, upon her arrival there, he was angry at her coming, made endless difficulties, refused sanction for Mass, was glad at length when they got a suitable house, still refused permission, and yielded at last only after long persuasion and delay. “He is a good man, even when he is angry, his anger passes quickly away.” (Found., XXXI, 36) was Teresa’s only comment on this difficult prelate.

Then there was the Princess of Eboh who brought the saint and her nuns to Pastrana but then made things impossible for them in a strange, perverse way. First, she forced them to accept a nun from another order. Later, grief-stricken at her husband’s death, she entered herself—but on her own conditions! This was the one monastery Teresa had to abandon, not for the suffering it caused her but because those dear daughters of hers were persecuted and harried by a half-demented woman.

The same trouble was nearly everywhere over finding a suitable house. Teresa found tedious searches, soul-deadening bargaining over price and conditions and lease and deeds and the rest, all the wearing and wearying ways of the world she thought to have left forever.

Finally, the discomforts of the poor nuns upon entering their new home, their utter want of everything, their dependence on friends who sometimes failed them, the cold and even the hunger of those early days, wore upon her. “We had brought nothing with us (they had nothing to bring) except what we had on, a tunic or two and a coif and what served for a covering for us in the carriages.” (Found., XXIV, ii.) “We were for some days with no other furniture but the two straw mattresses and the blanket and, on that first day (in March), we had not even a withered leaf to fry a sardine, when someone, I know not who he was, moved by Our Lord, left a ball of finely chopped meat mixed with bread in the church wherewith we helped ourselves.” (Found., XV, 3.) “At night it was cold and we felt it.” (Ib.) Elsewhere she tells of their being pleased to find an abundance of hay in a new house where they had nothing to sleep on or keep them warm.

Through all these trials and discomforts and in the face of contradictions from good men (“O Jesus, what it is to have to contend against many minds,” she wrote), Teresa was upheld “by the mighty hand of God.” It was by His wish and under His guidance that she undertook these toils and, as they were for His glory, she looked to Him in all confidence.

The history of her foundations shows He never failed her. “Teresa and two ducats are nothing—but Teresa, two ducats, and God are everything,” she wrote once when human aid was very low indeed. This was characteristic of her whole outlook.

Seventeen monasteries of women were the fruit, under God, of her many sacrifices (to say nothing of the fifteen convents of friars with which she had much to do also). Her work was not a small thing for “a poor barefooted nun” with nothing in the world but her own boundless desires and the help of the good God who never failed her.

The last house founded by the Saint was that of Burgos, in April of 1582. She was very ill and, with difficulty, reached Valladolid about the end of July, where she was grossly insulted by a lawyer who would have her violate the provisions of her brother’s will. Because she was just, the lawyer called her a wicked nun, who was less good than many who lived in the world. The Saint accepted the reproach, merely saying, “Our Lord reward you for your charity,” as if she deserved to be thus treated.

The Prioress of Valladolid turned against her and sent her away from the monastery. On September 16, the Saint reached Medina del Campo, where the Prioress there also treated her with the utmost disrespect. She then went to Alba de Tormes, and nearly died on the road for want of food. She came to Alba on the evening of the 20th. The next morning, she went with the utmost difficulty down to the church for Communion, then returned to her cell and her bed, never again to leave them. Fra Antonio of Jesus, the first who promised to accept her reform, administered the last Sacraments. Unable to speak, she turned towards her faithful companion, the Venerable Anne of Saint Bartholomew, drew herself towards her, and then crept into her arms. Anne held her there for fourteen hours. Then, seeing Our Lord with many saints at the foot of the bed, she prayed for her death that she might enter into joy. The instant she had finished her prayer, the Saint was dead. It was on the feast of Saint Francis, October 4, 1582.



“Teresa of Avila's Vision of the Dove”

by Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640). Oil on panel, c.1614.
Currently at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.



- * The original of this work is in the public domain in the United States and in countries and areas where the copyright term is the author's life plus 100 years or less.



This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

**8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000**

www.servi.org